

SELF-CARE

What Is Gum Disease?

Gum disease (also called periodontal disease) is an infection of the tissues surrounding and supporting the teeth. It is a major cause of tooth loss in adults. Because gum disease is usually painless you may not know you have it. Gum disease is caused by plaque, a sticky film of bacteria that constantly forms on the teeth. These bacteria create toxins that can damage the gums.

In the early stage of gum disease, called gingivitis, the gums can become red, swollen and bleed easily. At this stage, the disease is still reversible and can usually be eliminated by daily brushing and flossing. In the more advanced stages of gum disease, called periodontitis, the gums and bone that support the teeth can become seriously damaged. The teeth can become loose, fall out or have to be removed by a dentist.

What are the signs of gum disease?

- Swollen or tender gums
- Gums that have pulled away from the teeth
- Bad breath that doesn't go away
- Pus between your teeth and gums
- Loose teeth
- A change in the way your teeth fit together when you bite
- A change in the fit of partial dentures

How can I prevent gum disease?

1. Brush your teeth well twice a day.

This removes the film of bacteria from the teeth. Be sure to use a soft-bristled toothbrush that is in good condition and choose products that bear the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance.

2. Clean between your teeth every day.

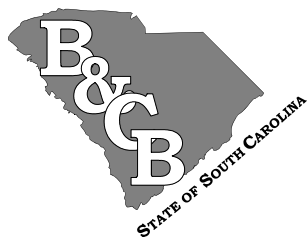
Cleaning between your teeth with floss or interdental cleaners removes bacteria and food particles from between the teeth, where a toothbrush can't reach.

3. Eat a balanced diet.

Choose a variety of foods from the basic food groups.

4. Visit your dentist regularly.

It is important to have regular dental checkups, and professional cleaning is essential to prevent periodontal diseases.



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South Carolina State Budget and Control Board
Office of Insurance Services-Insurance Benefits Management
July 2001

